

*Caution recommended in the Use and Application of
Scripture Language.*

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A
S E R M O N
PREACHED JULY 15, 1777,
IN THE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CARLISLE,
AT THE
V I S I T A T I O N
OF THE
RIGHT REVEREND
E D M U N D,
LORD BISHOP OF CARLISLE.

By WILLIAM PALEY, M. A.

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TO THE
RIGHT REVEREND
EDMUND

Lord Bishop of Carlisle,

THESE
DISCOURSES

ARE INSCRIBED

With Sentiments of great Respect and Gratitude,

By his LORDSHIP's most dutiful,

and most obliged Servant and Chaplain,

W. PALEY.



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Caution recommended in the Use and Application of Scripture Language.

2 PET. iii. 15, 16.

Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles speaking in them of those things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned, and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

IT must not be dissembled that there are many real difficulties in the Christian scriptures; whilst at the same time more, I believe, and greater, may justly be imputed to certain maxims of interpretation, which have obtained authority without reason, and are received without enquiry.—One of these, as I apprehend, is the expecting to find in the present circumstances

stances of christianity, a meaning for, or something answering to, every appellation and expression which occurs in scripture; or in other words, the applying to the personal condition of Christians at this day, those titles, phrases, propositions and arguments, which belong solely to the situation of christianity at its first institution.

I am aware of an objection which weighs much with many serious tempers, namely, that to suppose any part of scripture to be inapplicable to us, is to suppose a part of scripture to be useless; which seems to detract from the perfection we attribute to these oracles of salvation.—To this I can only answer, that it would have been one of the strangest things in the world, if the writings of the New Testament had not, like all other books, been composed for the apprehension, and consequently adapted to the circumstances, of the persons they were addressed to; and that it would have been equally strange, if the great, and in many respects the inevitable, alterations, which have taken place in those circumstances, did not vary the application of scripture language.

I design in the following discourse to propose some examples of this variation, from which you will judge, as I proceed, of the truth and importance of our general observation.

1. At the time the scriptures were written, none were *baptized* but converts, and none were converted but from conviction, and conviction produced for the most part a corresponding reformation of life and manners.—Hence *Baptism* was only another name for conversion, and con-
version

version was supposed to be sincere—in this sense was our Saviour's promise, “ ‘ he that believeth and is *baptized* shall be saved,” and in the same his command to St. Paul, “ ² arise and be *batpized*, and wash away thy sins;” this was that *baptism* “ for the remission of sins,” to which St. Peter³ invited the Jews upon the day of Pentecost; that “ *washing* of regeneration,” by which as St. Paul⁴ writes to Titus “ he saved us.” Now when we come to speak of the baptism which obtains in most christian churches at present, where no conversion is supposed, or possible; it is manifest, that if these expressions be applied at all, they must be applied with extreme qualification and reserve.

2. The community of Christians were at first a handful of men connected amongst themselves by the strictest union, and divided from the rest of the world by a real difference of principle and persuasion, and what was more observable, by many outward peculiarities of worship and behaviour.—This society considered collectively, and as a body, were set apart from the rest of mankind for a more gracious dispensation, as well as actually distinguished by a superior purity of life and conversation.—In this view, and in opposition to the unbelieving world, they were denominated in scripture by titles of great seeming dignity and import—they were “ ⁵ elect,” “ called,”

¹ Mark xvi. 16.

² Acts xxii. 16.

³ Acts ii. 38.

⁴ Titus iii. 5.

⁵ Rom. viii. 33. i. 6, 7.

“faints”—they were “⁶ in Christ”—they were “⁷ a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.”—That is, these terms were employed to distinguish the professors of christianity from the rest of mankind, in the same manner as the names of Greek and Barbarian, Jew and Gentile, distinguished the people of Greece and Israel from other nations. The application of such phrases to the whole *body* of christians is become now obscure ; partly, because it is not easy to conceive of christians as a *body* at all, by reason of the extent of their name and numbers, and the little visible union that subsists among them ; and partly, because the heathen world with whom they were compared, and to which comparison these phrases relate, is now ceased, or is removed from our observation.—Supposing therefore these expressions to have a perpetual meaning, and either forgetting the original use of them, or finding *that*, at this time, in a great measure exhausted and insignificant, we resort to a sense and application of them, easier it may be to our comprehension, but extremely foreign from the design of their authors, namely, to distinguish individuals amongst us, the professors of Christianity from one another—agreeably to which idea the most flattering of these names, the “elect,” “called,” “faints,” have by bold and unlearned men been appropriated to themselves and their own party with a presumption and conceit, injurious to the re-

⁶ Rom. viii. 1.⁷ 1 Pet. ii. ix.

putation of our religion amongst “them that are without,” and extremely disgusting to the sober part of its professors : whereas that such titles were intended in a sense common to all christian converts is well argued from many places in which they occur, in which places you may plainly substitute the terms *convert* or *converted* for the strongest of these phrases, without any alteration of the author’s meaning, e. g. “¹ dare any of you go to law before the unjust and not before the *saints*?” “² is any man *called* being circumcised, let him not become uncircumcised?” “³ the church that is at Babylon *elect*ed together with you saluteth you”—“⁴ salute Andronicus and Junia who were *in Christ* before me.”

3. In opposition to the Jews who were so much offended by the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, St. Paul maintains with great industry, that it was God Almighty’s intention from *the first* to substitute at a fit season into the place of the rejected Israelites a society of men taken indifferently out of all nations under heaven, and admitted to be the people of God upon easier and more comprehensive terms—this is expressed in the Epistle to the Ephesians as follows ; “⁵ having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath *purposed in himself*, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in

¹ Cor. vi. 1. ² vii. 18. ³ 1 Pet. v. 13. ⁴ Rom. xvi. 7.

⁵ Eph. i. 9, 10. also see Eph. iii. 5, 6.

Christ.”—The scheme of collecting such a society was what God *foreknew* before the foundation of the world; was what he did *predestinate*; was the *eternal purpose* which he purposed in Christ Jesus: and by consequence this society in their collective capacity were the objects of this *foreknowledge*, *predestination*, and *purpose*; that is, in the language of the apostles they were they “¹ whom he did *foreknow*,” they whom he did “*predestinate*”—they were ² *chosen in Christ* before the foundation of the world”—they were “³ *elect* according to the *foreknowledge* of God the Father.” This doctrine hath nothing in it harsh or obscure.—but what have we made of it?—The rejection of the Jews, and the adopting another community into their place, composed, whilst it was carrying on, an object of great magnitude in the attention of the inspired writers who understood and observed it.—This event, which engaged so much the thoughts of the Apostle, is now only read of, and hardly that—the reality and the importance of it are little known or attended to—Losing sight therefore of the proper occasion of these expressions, yet willing after our fashion to adapt them to ourselves, and finding nothing else in our circumstances that suited with them, we have learnt at length to apply them to the final destiny of individuals at the day of judgment; and upon this foundation has been erected a doctrine, which lays the ax at once to the root of all religion,

¹ Rom. viii. 29.² Eph. i. 4.³ 1 Pet. i. 2.

that

that of an absolute appointment to salvation or perdition, independant of ourselves or any thing we can do : and, what is extraordinary, those very arguments and expressions, (Rom. Chap. ix. x. xi.) which the Apostle employed to vindicate the impartial Mercies of God, against the narrow and excluding claims of Jewish prejudice, have been interpreted to establish a dispensation the most arbitrary and partial that could be devised.

4. The conversion of a grown person from heathenism to christianity, which is the case of conversion commonly intended in the epistles, was a change of which we have now no just conception—it was a new name, a new language, a new society; a new faith, a new hope; a new object of worship, a new rule of life; a history was disclosed, full of discovery and surprise; a prospect of futurity was unfolded, beyond imagination awful and august; the same description applies in a great part though not entirely to the conversion of a Jew. —This accompanied as it was with the pardon of every former sin, (Romans iii. 25.) was such an æra in a man's life, so remarkable a period in his recollection, such a revolution of every thing that was most important to him, as might well admit those strong figures and significant allusions by which it is described in scripture—it was a “¹ regeneration,” or new birth—it was to be “² born again of God and of the spirit”—it was to be “³ dead to sin,”

¹ Tit. iii. 5.

² John. i. 13. iii. 5.

³ Rom. vi. 2. 13.

and

and “ alive from the dead ”—it was to be
 “ ¹ buried with Christ in baptism, and raised
 together with him ”—it was “ ² a new creature ”
 and “ ³ new creation ”—it was a translation from
 the conditions of “ ⁴ slaves to that of sons ”—
 from “ ⁵ strangers and foreigners to be fellow
 citizens of the saints and of the household of
 God.”—It is manifest that no change equal
 or similar to the conversion of a heathen can
 be experienced by us, or by any one educated
 in a christian country, and to whom the facts,
 precepts and hopes of christianity have been
 from his infancy familiar—yet we will retain
 the same language—and what has been the con-
 sequence? One sort of men observing nothing
 in the lives of christians, corresponding to the
 magnificence if I may so say, of these expres-
 sions, have been tempted to conclude, that the
 expressions themselves had no foundation in
 truth and nature, or in any thing but the en-
 thusiasm of their authors.—Others again under-
 stand these phrases to signify nothing more,
 than that gradual amendment of life and con-
 versation, which reason and religion sometimes
 produce in particular christians—of which in-
 terpretation it is truly said, that it degrades
 too much the proper force of language, to ap-
 ply expressions of such energy and import to
 an event, so ordinary in its own nature, and
 which is common to christianity with every
 other moral institution. Lastly, a third sort,

¹ Col. ii. 12.² 2 Col. v. 17.³ Eph. iv. 24.⁴ Gal. iv. 7.⁵ Eph. ii. 19.

in order to satisfy these expressions to their full extent, having imagined to themselves certain perceptible impulses of the Holy Ghost, by which, in an instant, and in a manner, no doubt sufficiently extraordinary, they are "*regenerate and born of the spirit*"—they become "*new creatures*"—they are made the "*sons of God,*" who were before the "*children of wrath*"—they are "*freed from sin,*" and "*from death*"—they are chosen, that is, and sealed, without a possibility of fall, unto final salvation.—Whilst the patrons of a more sober exposition have been often challenged, and sometimes confounded with the question.—If such expressions of scripture do not mean *this*, what do they mean? To which we answer—nothing—nothing, that is, to us—nothing to be found, or sought for in the present circumstances of christianity.

More examples might be produced, in which the unwary use of scripture language has been the occasion of difficulties and mistakes—but I forbear—the present are sufficient to show, that it behoves every one, who undertakes to explain the scriptures, before he determines to whom or what, an expression is now a days to be applied, to consider diligently whether they admit of any application at all; or whether it is not rather to be restrained to the precise circumstances and occasion for which it was originally composed.

I make no apology for addressing this subject to this audience; because whatever relates
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to the interpretation of scripture, relates, as I conceive, to us; for, if, by any light we may cast upon those ancient books, we can enable and invite the people to read the bible for themselves, we discharge in my judgment the first duty of our function—ever bearing in mind that we are the ministers not of our own fame or fancies, but of the sincere gospel of Jesus Christ.



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IN A
S E R M O N,
P R E A C H E D
AT A GENERAL ORDINATION HOLDEN AT ROSE-CASTLE,
JULY 29th, 1781.

ADVERTISEMENT.

IT is recommended to those who are preparing for holy orders, within the Diocese of Carlisle, to read *Collier's Sacred Interpreter*, and the four Gospels with *Clark's Paraphrase*; and to candidates for Priests orders, carefully to peruse *Taylor's Paraphrase on the Romans*.

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A D V I C E

ADDRESSED TO THE

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I TIM. IV. 12.

Let no Man despise thy Youth.

THE author of this epistle, with many better qualities, possessed in a great degree what we at this day call a *knowledge of the world*. He knew, that although age and honours, authority of station, and splendor of appearance, usually command the veneration of mankind, unless counteracted by some degrading vice, or egregious impropriety of behaviour; yet, that where these advantages are wanting, where no distinction can be claimed from rank, importance from power, or dignity from years; in such circumstances, and under the inevitable depression of narrow fortunes, to procure and preserve respect requires both care and merit. The apostle also knew, and in the text taught his beloved convert, that to obtain the respect of those amongst whom he exercised his ministry, was an object deserving the ambition of a Christian

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teacher,

teacher, not indeed for his own sake, but for theirs, there being little reason to hope that any would profit by his instruction who despised his person.

If *St. Paul* thought an admonition of this sort worthy of a place in his epistle to *Timothy*, it cannot surely be deemed either beside or beneath the solemnity of this occasion, to deliver a few practicable rules of life and behaviour, which may recommend you to the esteem of the people, to whose service and salvation you are now about to dedicate your lives and labours.

In the first place, the stations which you are likely, for some time at least, to occupy in the church, although not capable of all the means of rendering service and challenging respect, which fall within the power of your superiors, are free from many prejudices that attend upon higher preferments. Interfering interests and disputed rights; or where there is no place for dispute, the very claim and reception of legal dues, so long as what is received by the minister is taken from the parishioner, form oftentimes an almost insuperable obstruction to the best endeavours that can be used to conciliate the good will of a neighbourhood. These difficulties perplex not *you*. In whatever contests with his parishioners, the *principal* may be engaged, the *curate* has neither dispute nor demand to stand between him and the affections of his congregation.

Another, and a still more favourable circumstance in your situation, is this; being upon a level with the greatest part of your parishioners,

you gain an access to their conversation and confidence, which is rarely granted to the superior clergy, without extraordinary address, and the most insinuating advances on their parts. And this is a valuable privilege; for it enables you to inform yourselves of the moral and religious state of your flock, of their wants and weaknesses, their habits and opinions, of the vices which prevail, and the principles from which they proceed: in a word, it enables you to study the distemper, before you apply the remedy; and not only so, but to apply the remedy in the most commodious form, and with the best effect; by private persuasion and reproof, by gentle and unsuspected conveyances in the intimacy of friendship and opportunities of conversation. To this must be added the many occasions, which the living in habits of society with your parishioners affords you of reconciling dissensions, healing animosities, administering advice to the young and inexperienced, and consolation to age and misery. I put you in mind of this advantage, because the right use of it constitutes one of the most respectable employments not only of our order, but of human nature; and leaves you, believe me, little to envy in the condition of your superiors, or to regret in your own. It is true, that this description supposes you to reside so constantly, and to continue so long in the same parish, as to have formed some acquaintance with the persons and characters of your parishioners; and what scheme of doing good in your profession, or even of doing your duty, does not suppose this?

But whilst I recommend a just concern for our reputation, and a proper desire of public esteem, I would by no means flatter that passion for praise and popularity, which seizes oftentimes the minds of young clergymen, especially when their first appearance in their profession has been received with more than common approbation. Unfortunate success! if it incite them to seek fame by affectation and hypocrisy, or lead, as vanity sometimes does, to enthusiasm and extravagance. This is not the taste or character I am holding out to your imitation. The popular preacher courts fame for its own sake, or for what he can make of it; the sincerely pious minister of Christ modestly invites esteem, only or principally, that it may lend efficacy to his instruction, and weight to his reproofs; the one seeks to be known and proclaimed abroad, the other is content with the silent respect of his neighbourhood, sensible that *that* is the theatre upon which alone his good name can assist him in the discharge of his duty.

It may be necessary likewise to caution you against some awkward endeavours to lift themselves into importance, which young clergymen not unfrequently fall upon; such as a conceited way of speaking, new airs and gestures, affected manners, a mimicry of the fashions, language, and diversions, or even of the follies and vices of higher life; a hunting after the acquaintance of the great, a cold and distant behaviour towards their former equals, and a contemptuous neglect of their society. Nothing was ever gained by these arts, if they

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deserve the name of arts, but derision and dislike—Possibly they may not offend against any rule of moral probity ; but if they disgust those with whom you are to live, and upon whom the good you do must be done, they defeat not only their own end, but, in a great measure, the very design and use of your vocation.

Having premised these few observations, I proceed to describe the qualities which principally conduce to the end we have at present in view, the possession of a fair and respected character.

And the first virtue (for so I will call it) which appears to me of importance for this purpose, is *frugality*. If there be a situation in the world in which profusion is without excuse, it is in that of a young clergyman who has little besides his profession to depend upon for his support. It is folly—it is ruin—Folly, for whether it aim at luxury or show, it must fall miserably short of its design. In these competitions we are outdone by every rival. The provision which clergymen meet with upon their entrance into the church, is adequate in most cases to the wants and decencies of their situation, but to nothing more.—To pretend to more, is to set up our poverty, not only as the subject of constant observation, but as a laughing stock to every observer. Profusion is ruin: for it ends, and soon too, in debt, in injustice, and insolvency. You well know how meanly, in the country more especially, every man is thought of who cannot pay his credit; in what terms he is spoken of, in what light he

is viewed, what a deduction this is from his good qualities, what an aggravation of his bad ones---what insults he is exposed to from his creditors, what contempt from all. Nor is this judgment far amiss. Let him not speak of honesty, who is daily practising deceit; for every man who is not paid is deceived. Let him not talk of liberality, who puts it out of his power to perform one act of it.—Let him not boast of spirit, of honour, of independence, who fears the face of his creditors, and who meets a creditor in every street. There is no meanness in frugality: the meanness is in those shifts and expedients, to which extravagance is sure to bring men. Profusion is a very equivocal proof of generosity. The proper distinction is not between him who spends, and him who saves; for they may be equally selfish; but between him who spends upon himself, and him who spends upon others. When I extol frugality, it is not to praise that minute parsimony which serves for little but to vex ourselves and those about us; but to persuade you to *economy upon a plan*, and that plan deliberately adjusted to your circumstances and expectations. Set out with it, and it is easy; to retrieve, out of a small income, is only not impossible. Frugality, in this sense, we preach not only as an article of prudence, but as a lesson of virtue. Of this frugality it has been said, that it is the parent of liberty, of independence, of generosity.

A second essential part of a clergyman's character, is *sobriety*. In the scale of human vices there

there may be some more criminal than drunkenness, but none so humiliating. A clergyman cannot, without infinite confusion, produce himself in the pulpit before those who have been witnesses to his intemperance. The folly and extravagance, the rage and ribaldry, the boasts and quarrels, the idiotism and brutality of that condition, will rise up in their imaginations in full colours. To discourse of temperance, to touch in the remotest degree on the subject, is but to revive his own shame. For you will soon have occasion to observe, that those who are the slowest in taking any part of a sermon to themselves, are surprisngly acute in applying it to the preacher.

Another vice, which there is the same, together with many additional reasons, for guarding you against, is *dissoluteness*. In my judgment, the crying sin and calamity of this country at present, is licentiousness in the intercourse of the sexes. It is a vice which hardly admits of argument or dissuasion. It can only be encountered by the censures of the good, and the discouragement it receives from the most respected orders of the community. What then shall we say, when they who ought to cure the malady, propagate the contagion. Upon this subject bear away one observation, that when you suffer yourselves to be engaged in any unchaste connection, you not only corrupt an individual by your solicitations, but debauch a whole neighbourhood by the profligacy of your example.

The habit I will next recommend, as the foundation

foundation of almost all other good ones, is retirement. Were I required to comprise my advice to young clergymen in one sentence, it should be in this, learn to live alone. Half of your faults originate from the want of this faculty. It is impatience of solitude which carries you continually from your parishes, your home, and your duty; makes you foremost in every party of pleasure and place of diversion; dissipates your thoughts, distracts your studies, leads you into expence, keeps you in distress, puts you out of humour with your profession, causes you to place yourselves at the head of some low company, or to fasten yourselves as despicable retainers to the houses and society of the rich. Whatever may be the case with those, whose fortunes and opportunities can command a constant succession of company, in situations like ours to be able to pass our time with satisfaction alone, and at home, is not only a preservative of character, but the very secret of happiness. Do what we will, we must be much and often by ourselves: if this be irksome, the main portions of life will be unhappy. Besides which, we are not the less qualified for society, because we are able to live without it. Our company will be the more welcome for being never obtruded. It is with this, as with many pleasures, he meets it the oftenest, and enjoys it the best, who can most easily dispense with the want of it.

But what, you say, shall I do alone? reading is my proper occupation and my pleasure, but books are out of my reach, and beyond my purchase.

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purchase. They who make this complaint, are such as seek nothing from books but amusement, and find amusement in none but works of narrative or imagination. This taste, I allow, cannot be supplied by any moderate expence or ordinary opportunities: but apply yourselves to study, take in hand any branch of useful science, especially of those parts of it which are subsidiary to the knowledge of religion, and a few books will suffice; for instance, a commentary upon the New Testament read so as to be remembered, will employ a great deal of leisure very profitably. There is likewise another resource which you have forgot, I mean the composition of sermons. I am far from refusing you the benefit of other men's labours; I only require that they be called in not to flatter laziness, but to assist industry. You find yourself unable to furnish a sermon every week, try to compose one every month: depend upon it you will consult your own satisfaction, as well as the edification of your hearers; and that however inferior your compositions may be to those of others in some respects, they will be better delivered, and better received; they will compensate for many defects by a closer application to the ways and manners, the actual thoughts, reasoning and language, the errors, doubts, prejudices and vices, the habits, characters, and propensities of your congregation, than can be expected from borrowed discourses—at any rate you are passing your time virtuously and honourably.

With retirement, I connect reserve; by
which

which I mean, in the first place, some degree of delicacy in the choice of your company, and of refinement in your pleasures. Above all things keep out of public houses—you have no business there—your being seen to go in and out of them is disgraceful—your presence in those places entitles every man who meets you there, to affront you by coarse jests, by indecent or opprobrious topics of conversation—Neither be seen at drunken feasts, boisterous sports, late hours, or barbarous diversions—Let your amusements, like every thing about you, be still and quiet and unoffending. Carry the same reserve into your correspondence with your superiors. Pursue preferment, if any prospects of it present themselves, not only by honourable means, but with moderate anxiety. It is not essential to happiness, perhaps not very conducive—were it of greater importance than it is, no more successful rule could be given you, than to do your duty quietly and contentedly, and to let things take their course. You may have been brought up with different notions, but be assured, that for once that preferment is forfeited by modesty, it is ten times lost by intrusion and importunity—Every one sympathises with neglected merit, but who shall lament over repulsed impudence?

The last expedient I shall mention, and in conjunction with the others, a very efficacious one towards engaging respect, is seriousness in your deportment, especially in discharging the offices of your profession. Salvation is so awful a concern, that no human being, one would think,

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think, could be pleased with seeing it, or any thing belonging to it, treated with levity. For a moment, in a certain state of the spirit, men may divert themselves, or affect to be diverted, by sporting with their most sacred interests; but no one in his heart derides religion long.—What are we, any of us?—Religion will soon be our only care and friend. Seriousness therefore in a clergyman is agreeable, not only to the serious, but to men of all tempers and descriptions. And seriousness is enough: a prepossessing appearance, a melodious voice, a graceful delivery, are indeed enviable accomplishments; but much, we apprehend, may be done without them. The great point is to be thought in earnest. Seem not then to be brought to any part of your duty by constraint, to perform it with reluctance, to go through it in haste, or to quit it with symptoms of delight. In reading the services of the church, provided you manifest a consciousness of the meaning and importance of what you are about, and betray no contempt of your duty, or of your congregation, your manner cannot be too plain and simple. Your common method of speaking, if it be not too low, or too rapid, do not alter, or only so much as to be heard distinctly. I mention this, because your elocution is more apt to offend by straining and stiffness, than on the side of ease and familiarity. The same plainness and simplicity which I recommend in the delivery, prefer also in the style and composition of your sermons. Ornaments, or even accuracy of language, cost the writer much trouble, and produce

produce small advantage to the hearer. Let the character of your sermons be truth, and information, and *a decent particularity*—Propose one point in one discourse, and stick to it; a hearer never carries away more than one impression—disdain not the old fashion of dividing your sermons into heads—in the hands of a master, this may be dispensed with; in yours, a sermon which rejects these helps to perspicuity, will turn out a bewildered rhapsody, without aim or effect, order or conclusion. In a word, strive to make your discourses useful, and they who profit by your preaching, will soon learn, and long continue to be pleased with it.

I have now finished the enumeration of those qualities which are required in the clerical character; and which, wherever they meet, make even youth venerable, and poverty respected; which will secure esteem under every disadvantage of fortune, person, and situation, and notwithstanding great defects of abilities and attainments. But I must not stop here: a good name, fragrant and precious as it is, is by us only valued in subserviency to our duty, in subordination to a higher reward. If we are more tender of our reputation, if we are more studious of esteem than others, it is from a persuasion, that by first obtaining the respect of our congregation, and next by availing ourselves of that respect, to promote amongst them peace and virtue, useful knowledge and benevolent dispositions, we are purchasing to ourselves a reversion and inheritance valuable above all price, important beyond every other interest or success.

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Go then into the vineyard of the gospel, and may the grace of God go with you. The religion you preach is true. Dispense its ordinances with seriousness, its doctrines with sincerity—urge its precepts, display its hopes, produce its terrors—“be sober, be vigilant”—“have a good report”—confirm the faith of others, testify and adorn your own, by the virtues of your life, and the sanctity of your reputation—Be peaceable, be courteous; condescending to men of the lowest condition—“apt to teach, willing to communicate,” so far as the immutable laws of truth and probity will permit, “be every thing unto all men, that ye may gain some.”

The world will requite you with its esteem. The awakened sinner, the enlightened saint—the young whom you have trained to virtue, the old whom you have visited with the consolations of Christianity, shall pursue you with prevailing blessings, and effectual prayers. You will close your lives and ministry with consciences void of offence, and full of hope.—To present at the last day even one recovered soul, reflect how grateful an offering it will be to *him*, whose commission was to save a world—infinite, no doubt, but still only in degree, does your office differ from *his*—himself the first born, it was the business of his life, the merit of his death, the council of his father’s love, the exercise and consummation of his own, “to bring many brethren unto glory.”

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DISTINCTION OF ORDERS
IN THE
C H U R C H,
D E F E N D E D
Upon Principles of PUBLIC UTILITY,
I N A
S E R M O N

Preached in the
C A S T L E - C H A P E L, D U B L I N,
At the Consecration of
J O H N L A W, D. D.

Lord Bishop of CLONFERT and KILMACDUAGH,

September 21, 1782.

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Upon Principles of PUBLIC UTILITY.

EPHESIANS IV. 11, 12.

*And he gave some, apostles, and some, prophets;
and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and
teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for
the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the
body of Christ.*

IN our reasoning and discourses upon the
rules and nature of the Christian dispensation,
there is no distinction which ought to be pre-
served with greater care, than that which exists
between the institution, as it addresses the con-
science and regulates the duty of particular
Christians, and as it regards the discipline and
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government of the Christian church. It was our Saviour's design, and the first object of his ministry, to afford to a lost and ignorant world such discoveries of their Creator's will, of their own interest, and future destination; such assured principles of faith, and rules of practice; such new motives, terms, and means of obedience, as might enable all, and engage many, to enter upon a course of life, which, by rendering the person who pursued it acceptable to God, would conduct him to happiness, in another stage of his existence.

It was a second intention of the founder of Christianity, but subservient to the former, to associate those who consented to take upon them the profession of his faith and service, into a separate community, for the purpose of united worship and mutual edification, for the better transmission and manifestation of the faith that was delivered to them, but principally, to promote the exercise of that fraternal disposition which their new relation to each other, which the visible participation of the same name and hope and calling, was calculated to excite.

From a view of these distinct parts of the evangelic dispensation, we are led to place a real difference between the religion of particular Christians, and the polity of Christ's church. The one is personal and individual—acknowledges no subjection to human authority—transacted in the heart—is an account between God and our own consciences alone: the other appertaining to society (like every thing which

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relates to the joint interest, and requires the co-operation of many persons) is visible and external—prescribes rules of common order, for the observation of which, we are responsible not only to God, but to the society of which we are members, or, what is the same thing, to those with whom the public authority of the society is deposited.

But the difference which I am principally concerned to establish, consists in this, that whilst the precepts of Christian morality, and the fundamental articles of its faith, are for the most part precise and absolute, are of perpetual, universal, and unalterable obligation; the laws which respect the discipline, instruction, and government of the community, are delivered in terms so general and indefinite as to admit of an application adapted to the mutable condition and varying exigencies of the Christian church. “As my Father hath sent me, so send I you.” “Let every thing be done decently and in order.” “Lay hands suddenly on no man.” “Let him that ruleth do it with diligence.” “The things which thou hast heard of me, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” “For this cause left I thee, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city.”

These are all general directions, supposing indeed the existence of a regular ministry in the church, but describing no specific order of pre-eminence or distribution of office and authority. If any other instances can be adduced

more circumstantial than these, they will be found like the appointment of the seven deacons, the collections for the saints, the laying by in store upon the first day of the week, to be rules of the society rather than laws of the religion.....recommendations and expedients fitted to the state of the several churches, by those who then administered the affairs of them, rather than precepts delivered with a solemn design of fixing a constitution for succeeding ages. The just ends of religious, as of civil union, are eternally the same ; but the means, by which these ends may be best promoted and secured, will vary with the vicissitudes of time and occasion, will differ according to the local circumstances, the peculiar situation, the improvement, character, or even the prejudices and passions of the several communities upon whose conduct and edification they are intended to operate.

The apostolic directions, which are preserved in the writings of the New Testament, seem to exclude no ecclesiastical constitution which the experience and more instructed judgment of future ages might find it expedient to adopt. And this reserve, if we may so call it, in the legislature of the Christian church, was wisely suited to its primitive condition compared with its expected progress and extent. The circumstances of Christianity, in the early period of its propagation, were necessarily very unlike those which would take place when it became the established religion of great nations. The rudiments indeed of the future plant were in-

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volved within the grain of mustard-feed ; but still a different treatment was required for its sustentation, when the birds of the air lodged amongst its branches. A small select society under the guidance of inspired teachers, without temporal rights and without property, founded in the midst of enemies and living in subjection to unbelieving rulers, divided from the rest of the world by many singularities of conduct and persuasion, and adverse to the idolatry which public authority every-where supported, differed so much from the Christian church after Christianity prevailed as the religion of the state ; when its œconomy became gradually interwoven with the civil government of the country ; when the purity and propagation of its faith were left to the ordinary expedients of human instruction and an authentic scripture ; when persecution and indigence were to be succeeded by legal security and public provision.....clandestine and precarious opportunities of hearing the word and communicating in the rites of Christianity, by stationary pastors and appropriated seasons, as well as places, of religious worship and resort : I say, the situation of the Christian community was so different in the infant and adult state of Christianity, that the highest inconvenience would have followed from establishing a precise constitution which was to be obligatory upon both ; the same disposition of affairs which was most commodious and conducive to edification in the one, becoming probably impracticable under

the circumstances, or altogether inadequate to the wants, of the other.

What farther recommends the forbearance observable in this part of the Christian institution, is the consideration, that as Christianity solicited admission into every country in the world, it cautiously refrained from interfering with the municipal regulations or civil condition of any. Negligent of every view, but what related to the deliverance of mankind from spiritual perdition, the Saviour of the world advanced no pretensions, which, by disturbing the arrangements of human polity, might present an obstacle to the reception of his faith. We may ascribe it to this design, that he left the laws of his church so open and indeterminate, that whilst the ends of religious communion were sufficiently declared, the form of the society might be assimilated to the civil constitution of each country, to which it should always communicate strength and support in return for the protection it received. If there be any truth in these observations, they lead to this temperate and charitable conclusion, “that Christianity may be professed under any form of church government.”

But though all things are lawful, all things are not expedient — If we concede to other churches the Christian legality of their constitution, so long as Christian worship and instruction are competently provided for, we may be allowed to maintain the advantage of our own, upon principles which all parties acknowledge — considerations of public utility. We may

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may be allowed to contend, that whilst we imitate, so far as a great disparity of circumstances permits, the example, and what we apprehend to be the order of the apostolic age, our church and ministry are inferior to none in the great object of their institution, their suitability to support and uphold the profession, knowledge, and influence of pure Christianity. The separation of a particular order of men for the work of the ministry—the reserving to these, exclusively, the conduct of public worship and the preaching of the word—the distribution of the country into districts, and the assigning of each district to the care and charge of its proper pastor—lastly, the appointment to the clergy of a maintenance independent of the caprice of their congregation, are measures of ecclesiastical policy which have been adopted by every national establishment of Christianity in the world. Concerning these points there exists no controversy. The chief article of regulation, upon which the judgment of some protestant churches dissents from ours, is, that whilst they have established a perfect parity amongst their clergy, we prefer a distinction of orders in the church, not only as recommended by the usage of the purest times, but as better calculated to promote, what all churches must desire, the credit and efficacy of the sacerdotal office.

The force and truth of this last consideration I will endeavour to evince.

FIRST. The body of the clergy, in common with every regular society, must necessarily contain

contain some internal provision for the government and correction of its members. Where a distinction of orders is not acknowledged, this government can only be administered by synods and assemblies, because the supposition of equality forbids the delegation of authority to single persons. Now although it may be requisite to consult and collect the opinions of a community, in the momentous deliberations which ought to precede the establishment of those public laws by which it is to be bound; yet in every society the execution of these laws, the current and ordinary affairs of its government are better managed by fewer hands. To commit personal questions to public debate—to refer every case and character, which requires animadversion, to the suffrages and examination of a numerous assembly—what is it, but to feed and to perpetuate contention, to supply materials for endless altercation, and opportunities for the indulgence of concealed enmity and private prejudices? The complaint of ages testifies, with how much inflammation, and how little equity, ecclesiastical conventions have conducted their proceedings; how apt intrigue has ever been to pervert inquiry, and clamour to confound discussion. Whatever may be the other benefits of equality, peace is best secured by subordination. And if this be a consideration of moment in every society, it is of peculiar importance to the clergy. Preachers of peace, ministers of charity and of reconciliation to the world, that constitution surely ill befits their office and character, which has

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tendency to engage them in contests and disputes with one another.

SECONDLY. The appointment of various orders in the church may be considered as the stationing of ministers of religion in the various ranks of civil life. The distinctions of the clergy ought in some measure to correspond with the distinctions of lay-society, in order to supply each class of the people with a clergy of their own level and description, with whom they may live and associate upon terms of equality. This reason is not imaginary nor insignificant. The usefulness of a virtuous and well-informed clergy consists neither wholly nor principally in their public preaching, or the stated functions of their order. It is from the example, and in the society of such persons that the requisites which prepare the mind for the reception of virtue and knowledge, a taste for serious reflection and discourse, habits of thought and reasoning, a veneration for the laws and awful truths of Christianity, a disposition to inquire, and a solicitude to learn, are best gained; at least, the decency of deportment, the sobriety of manners and conversation, the learning, the gravity, which usually accompany the clerical character, insensibly diffuse their influence over every company into which they are admitted. Is it of no importance to provide friends and companions of this character for the superior as well as for the middle orders of the community? Is it flattery, to say, that the manners and society of higher life would suffer some degradation, from the loss of so many men of liberal

liberal habits and education, as at present, by occupying elevated stations in the church, are intitled to be received into its number? This intercourse would cease, if the clergy were reduced to a level with one another, and, of consequence, with the inferior part of the community. These distinctions, whilst they prevail must be complied with. How much soever the Moralist may despise, or the Divine overlook, the discriminations of rank, which the rules or prejudices of modern life have introduced into society, when we have the world to instruct and to deal with, we must take and treat it as it is, not as the wishes or the speculations of philosophy would represent it to our view. When we describe the public as peculiarly interested in every thing which affects though but remotely, the character of the great and powerful, it is not that the soul of the rich man is more precious than the salvation of the poor, but because his virtues and his vices have a more considerable and extensive effect.

THIRDLY: They who behold the privilege and emoluments of the superior clergy with the most unfriendly inclination, profess nevertheless to wish, that the order itself should be respected.—But how is this respect to be procured?—is equally impossible, to invest every clergyman with the decorations of affluence and rank, and to maintain the credit and reputation of an order which is altogether destitute of these distinctions. Individuals, by the singularity of their virtue or their talents, may surmount the disadvantages; but the order will be contemned

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At present, every member of our ecclesiastical establishment communicates in the dignity which is conferred upon a few—every clergyman shares in the respect which is paid to his superiors—the ministry is honoured in the persons of its prelates. Nor is this œconomy peculiar to *our* order. The profession of arms and of the law derive their lustre and esteem, not merely from their utility (which is a reason only to the few), but from the exalted place in the scale of civil life, which hath been wisely assigned to those who fill stations of power and eminence in these great departments. And if this disposition of honours be approved in other kinds of public employment, why should not the credit and liberality of ours be upheld by the same expedient?

FOURTHLY. Rich and splendid situations in the church have been justly regarded as prizes, held out to invite persons of good hopes and ingenuous attainments to enter into its service. The value of the prospect may be the same, but the allurements are much greater, where opulent shares are reserved to reward the success of a few, than where, by a more equal partition of the fund, all indeed are competently provided for, but no one can raise even his hopes beyond a penurious mediocrity of subsistence and situation. It is certainly of consequence that young men of promising abilities be encouraged to engage in the ministry of the church—otherwise, our profession will be composed of the refuse of every other. None will be found content to stake the fortune of their lives in this calling,

calling, but they whom slow parts, personal defects, or a depressed condition of birth and education, preclude from advancement in any other. The vocation, in time, comes to be thought mean and uncreditable—study languishes—sacred erudition declines—not only the order is disgraced, but religion itself disparaged in such hands. Some of the most judicious and moderate of the presbyterian clergy have been known to lament this defect in their constitution. They see and deplore the backwardness in youth of active and well-cultivated faculties, to enter into the church, and their frequent resolutions to quit it. Again, if a gradation of orders be necessary to invite candidates into the profession, it is still more so to excite diligence and emulation, to promote an attention to character and public opinion when they are in it; especially, to guard against that sloth and negligence, into which men are apt to fall, who are arrived too soon at the limit of their expectations. We will not say, that the race is always to the swift, or the prize to the deserving; but we have never known that age of the church, in which the advantage was not on the side of learning and decency.

These reasons appear to me to be well founded, and they have this in their favour, that they do not suppose too much, they suppose not any impracticable precision in the reward of merit, or any greater degree of disinterestedness, circumspection, and propriety in the bestowing of ecclesiastical preferment than what actually takes place. They are, however, much strengthened,

strengthened, and our ecclesiastical constitution defended with yet greater success, when men of conspicuous and acknowledged merit are called to its superior stations—"when it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth." When pious labours and exemplary virtue, when distinguished learning, or eminent utility, when long or arduous services are repaid with affluence and dignity, when a life of severe and well-directed application to the studies of religion, when wasted spirits and declining health are suffered to repose in honourable leisure, the good and wise applaud a constitution which has provided such things for such men.

Finally, let us reflect, that these, after all, are but secondary objects. Christ came not to found an empire upon earth, or to invest his church with temporal immunities. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost"—to purify to himself, from amidst the pollutions of a corrupt world, "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." As far as our establishment conduces to forward and facilitate these ends, so far we are sure it falls in with his design, and is sanctified by his authority.—And whilst they who are entrusted with its government employ their cares, and the influence of their stations, in judicious and unremitting endeavours to enlarge the dominion of virtue and of Christianity over the hearts and affections of mankind—whilst "by pureness, by knowledge," by the aids of learning, by the piety of their example, they labour to inform the consciences and improve the morals of the people committed to
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their charge, they secure to themselves, and to the church in which they preside, peace and permanency, reverence and support—what is infinitely more, they “save their own souls”—they prepare for the approach of that tremendous day, when Jesus Christ shall return again to the world and to his church, at once the gracious rewarder of the toils, and patience, and fidelity of his servants, and the strict avenger of abused power and neglected duty.

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